

Chapter 114

NUISANCE PROPERTIES

[HISTORY: Adopted by the Mayor and Council of the City of Seat Pleasant 1-9-2006 by Ord. No. 05-04.¹ Amendments noted where applicable.]

GENERAL REFERENCES

Brush, grass and weeds — See Ch. 59.
Building construction — See Ch. 63.
Unfit buildings; property maintenance — See Ch. 67.
Health and sanitation — See Ch. 101.
Solid waste — See Ch. 129.
Storage of vehicles — See Ch. 154.

§ 114-1. Purpose.

Chronic nuisance properties present grave health, safety and welfare concerns, which the property owners or persons in charge of such properties have failed to take corrective action to abate the nuisance condition. Chronic nuisance properties have a tremendous negative impact upon the quality of life, safety and health of the neighborhoods where they are located. This chapter is enacted to remedy nuisance activities that repeatedly occur or exist at chronic nuisance properties by providing a process for abatement; and this remedy is not an exclusive remedy available under any state or local laws and may be used in conjunction with such other laws. Also, chronic nuisance properties are a financial burden to the City by the repeated calls for service to the properties because of the nuisance activities that repeatedly occur or exist on such property, and this chapter is a means to ameliorate those conditions and hold responsible the owners or persons in charge of such property.

§ 114-2. Definitions.

For purposes of this chapter, the following words or phrases shall have the meaning prescribed below:

ABATE — To repair, replace, remove, destroy, or otherwise remedy a condition which constitutes a violation of this chapter by such means and in such a manner and to such an extent as the applicable City administrator or designee determines is necessary in the interest of the general health, safety and welfare of the community, including, but not limited to:

- A. Restricting or limiting noise, loitering, parking or access to the property, including posting the property with signs indicating such restrictions.
- B. Limiting the hours of operation of a business.
- C. Closing the property for not less than 10 days nor more than six months.

¹. Editor's Note: This ordinance was adopted as Ch. 155, but was renumbered to maintain the alphabetical organization of the Code.

- D. Entering premises for purposes of removing, compelling the removal or destruction of the structure, thing, substance, condition or property constituting a nuisance.
- E. Filing a civil complaint in a court of competent jurisdiction.

CHRONIC NUISANCE PROPERTY — Property on which three or more nuisance activities occur within any thirty-day period, or five or more separate incidents listed below within any sixty-day period, at least one of which separate incident must have resulted in a citation or arrest.

CONTROL — The ability to regulate, restrain, dominate, counteract or govern property, or conduct that occurs on a property.

DRUG-RELATED ACTIVITY — Any unlawful activity at a property which consists of the manufacture, delivery, sale, storage, possession, or giving away of any controlled substance.

LANDLORD — The owner, lessor, or sublesor of the dwelling unit or the property of which it is a part, and, in addition, means any person designated as a representative of the landlord.

NUISANCE ACTIVITY — Includes:

- A. A nuisance as defined by state law or local ordinance occurring around or near the property; or
- B. Any of the following activities, behaviors or criminal conduct:
 - (1) Stalking;
 - (2) Discharge of a firearm in violation;
 - (3) Minor in possession of alcohol;
 - (4) Public urination and indecent exposure;
 - (5) Endangering the welfare of a minor;
 - (6) Criminal mischief;
 - (7) Harassment;
 - (8) Failure to disperse;
 - (9) Disorderly conduct;
 - (10) Assault, including domestic violence assault;
 - (11) Reckless endangerment;
 - (12) Prostitution;
 - (13) Patronizing a prostitute;
 - (14) Begging;
 - (15) Public consumption of alcohol;
 - (16) Disorderly house, as defined by;

- (17) Indecent exposure;
- (18) Lewd conduct;
- (19) Any firearms violation listed in;
- (20) Noise;
- (21) Loitering for the purpose of engaging in drug-related activity;
- (22) Drug-related activity; possession, manufacture, or delivery of a controlled substance or related offenses;
- (23) Gang related activity (as defined in); and
- (24) Any attempt to commit and/or conspiracy to commit any of the above activities, behaviors or conduct.

OWNER — Any person having any interest in the real estate in question as indicated in the records of the office of the Maryland State Assessment and Taxation Office, or who establishes, under this chapter, his or her ownership interest therein.

PERSON — A Natural person, joint venture, partnership, association, club, company, corporation, business trust, organization, or the manager, lessee, agent, officer or employee of any of them.

PERSON ASSOCIATED WITH A PROPERTY — Any person who, on the occasion of a nuisance activity, has entered, patronized, visited, or attempted to enter, patronize or visit, or waited to enter, patronize or visit a property or a person present on property, including, without limitation, any officer, director, customer, agent, employee, or any independent contractor of a property, or a person in charge of or owner of a property.

PERSON IN CHARGE OF A PROPERTY — Any person, in actual or constructive possession of a property, including but not limited to an owner, occupant, agent, or property manager of a property under his or her control.

PREMISES AND PROPERTY — May be used by this chapter interchangeably and means any building, lot, parcel, dwelling, rental unit, real estate or land or portion thereof, including property used as residential or commercial property.

RENTAL UNIT — Any structure or that part of a structure, including but not limited to single family home, room or apartment, which is rented to another and used as a home, residence, or sleeping place by one or more persons; Properties.

§ 114-3. Violations.

- A. Any property within the City of Seat Pleasant which is a chronic nuisance property is in violation of this chapter and subject to its remedies; and
- B. Any person in charge who permits property to be a chronic nuisance property shall be in violation of this chapter and subject to its remedies.

§ 114-4. Procedure.

- A. When the Chief of Police, or his designee, receives police documentation confirming the occurrence of three or more nuisance activities within a sixty-day period on the property, the Chief of Police, or his designee, may review such reports to determine whether they describe the nuisance activities enumerated in § 114-2. Upon such a finding, the Chief of Police, or his designee, shall notify a property owner at the address shown on the County Auditor records and shall notify the person in charge of the property in writing that the property is in danger of being declared a chronic nuisance property.
- B. The notice shall contain:
- (1) The street address or a legal description sufficient for identification of the property;
 - (2) A concise description of the nuisance activities that exist, or that have occurred on the property;
 - (3) A demand that the owner or person in charge respond to the chief or his designee within 10 days of service of the notice to discuss the nuisance activities and create a plan to abate the chronic nuisance;
 - (4) An offer to the person in charge of an opportunity to abate the nuisance activities giving rise to the violation; and
 - (5) A statement describing that if legal action is sought, the property could be subject to closure, civil penalties and/or costs assessed up to \$100 per day after the notice of the chronic nuisance property is received.
- C. Such notice shall be either:
- (1) Personally served; or
 - (2) Delivered by first class mail to the person in charge of the property with a copy mailed to the owner at the address indicated by the City of Seat Pleasant Treasurer, if different than the person in charge of the property.
- D. If the person in charge fails to respond to the notice within the time prescribed, the Chief of Police, or his designee, shall post such notice at the property and issue the person in charge a Class One civil infraction. If the person in charge fails to respond to the issued infraction, the matter shall be referred to the Office of the City Attorney for further action.
- E. If the person in charge responds as required by the notice and agrees to abate the nuisance activity, the Chief of Police, or his designee, and the person in charge and/or property owner may work out an agreed-upon course of action which would abate the nuisance activity. If an agreed course of action does not result in the abatement of the nuisance activities or if no agreement concerning abatement is reached, the matter shall be forwarded to the City Administrator for enforcement action.
- F. It is a defense to an action for chronic nuisance property that the person in charge at all material times could not, in the exercise of reasonable care or diligence, determine that the property had become chronic nuisance property, or could not, in spite of the exercise of reasonable care and diligence, control the conduct leading to the determination that the property is chronic nuisance property.

§ 114-5. Commencement of action; enforcement.

- A. Once the matter is referred to the City Attorney, the City Attorney shall immediately review and make a determination to initiate legal action authorized under this chapter or state statute, or may seek alternative forms of abatement of the nuisance activity. The City Attorney may initiate legal action on the chronic nuisance property and seek civil penalties and costs in superior court for the abatement of the nuisance.
- B. In determining whether a property shall be deemed a chronic nuisance property and subject to the court's jurisdiction, the City shall have the initial burden of proof to show by a preponderance of the evidence that the property is a chronic nuisance property. The City may submit official police reports and other affidavits outlining the information that led to arrest(s), and other chronic nuisance activity occurring or existing at the property. The failure to prosecute an individual, or the fact no one has been convicted of a crime, is not a defense to a chronic nuisance action.
- C. Once a superior court determines the property to be a chronic nuisance under this chapter, the court may impose a civil penalty against any or all of the persons in charge of the property and/or the owner of the property, and may order any other relief deemed appropriate.
 - (1) A civil penalty may be assessed for up to \$100 per day for each day the nuisance activity continues to occur following the date of the original notice by the Chief of Police, or his designee, as described in § 114-4.
 - (2) In assessing the civil penalty, the court may consider the following factors, citing to those found applicable:
 - (a) The actions taken by the person in charge and/or owner to mitigate or correct the nuisance activity;
 - (b) The financial condition of the persons in charge;
 - (c) The repeated or continuous nature of the nuisance activity;
 - (d) The statements of the neighbors or those affected by the nuisance activity; and
 - (e) Any other factor deemed relevant by the court.
- D. The superior court which determined the property to be a chronic nuisance property shall also assess costs against the person in charge and/or owner in the amount it costs the City to abate, or attempt to abate, the nuisance activity.
- E. If the superior court determines the property to be a chronic nuisance property, the superior court shall order the property closed and secured against all unauthorized access, use and occupancy for a period up to one year, and may impose a civil penalty and costs.
- F. Once a determination has been made by the superior court that the chronic nuisance property shall be subject to closure, the court may authorize the City to physically secure the premises and initiate such closure. Costs for such closure shall be submitted to the court for review. Any civil penalty and/or costs awarded to the City may be filed with the City Treasurer, who shall cause the same to be filed as a lien on the property with the County

Treasurer. The City shall file a formal lis pendens notice when an action for abatement is filed in the superior court.

- G. The superior court shall retain jurisdiction during any period of closure or abatement of the property.
- H. Spokane Municipal Court is to have jurisdiction of all civil infractions issued pursuant to this chapter.

§ 114-6. Summary closure.

Nothing in this chapter prohibits the City of Seat Pleasant from taking any emergency action for the summary closure of such property when it is necessary to avoid an immediate threat to public welfare and safety. The City may take summary action to close the property without complying with the notification provisions of § 114-3, but shall provide such notice as is reasonable under the circumstances.

§ 114-7. Severability.

If any portion of this chapter, or its application to any person or circumstances, is held invalid, the validity of the chapter as a whole, or any other portion thereof, or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected.